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ABSTRACT

Community colleges recognize the need to plan and implement change through professional development, particularly in light of the constantly changing environment in the community college. This digest briefly examines four of the delivery methods being employed by community colleges in the field of professional development. Between 1999 and 2002, about 35% of the faculty retired from St. Louis Community College (SLCC). SLCC developed the New Faculty Orientation (NFO) program as a way to strengthen the college through new faculty. NFO included a week-long orientation, weekly campus activities, and instructional skills weekend workshops. Valencia Community College in Florida set up an online faculty development program consisting of a face-to-face orientation meeting followed by online sessions. The online sessions are asynchronous, and facilitate a course in commonly encountered teaching and learning problems in community colleges. The Teaching and Learning Center at College of Du Page in Illinois presents courses and workshops and invites all personnel to participate. Faculty, administrators, and staff attend courses together. The Great Teachers Seminar (GTS) concept, which is a loosely structured faculty retreat, has evolved into the Great College Seminar, where the entire staff is invited to participate. This digest is drawn from the New Directions for Community Colleges journal, Number 120. (NB)

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ERIC Clearinghouse for Community Colleges

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Digest

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Professional Development: Leading Organizational Change in Community Colleges

By Stefanie Stern

During the last few decades, professional development programs at many community colleges have evolved into dynamic forces creating institutional change by design. Comprehensive and powerful professional development programs have emerged that are no longer solely employee-centered outlets for individual improvement. Contemporary programs typically include *all* employees, recognizing that classified staff, counselors, administrators, college leaders, and faculty play significant roles in the shaping of the organization. Professional development itself focuses on topics specific to employee classification, but also examines issues facing the college as a whole. New goals of professional development are twofold: (1) to provide in-service training to all employee groups in a college, keeping in mind the challenges in reaching all employees, and (2) to enhance the broader mission and goals of the institution. The combination of the two is leading to substantive organizational change within community colleges.

This Digest, drawn from "Enhancing Community Colleges Through Professional Development" (New Directions for Community Colleges, Winter 2002), reviews the context for the professional development movement today, describes programs that have utilized new formats for delivery, and demonstrates the impact professional development can make in addressing institutional needs.

Professional Development: What is it?

Faced with a constantly changing environment – "an increasingly diverse student body with varying expectations, learning styles, and service preferences; new and growing competition; technological advancements; and changing governmental policies and societal demands" – community colleges have recognized the need to plan and implement change through professional development (Watts and Hammons, 2002, pp. 5-6). Watts (2002) describes professional development as it emerged three decades ago as "loose connections of activities" that "when strung together looked fairly impressive" (p. 1). Watts and Hammons (2002) state that early programs were intended to support the college in becoming more efficient and effective in a time of increased public accountability and competition for limited tax dollars. Programs were employee-centered and focused primarily on faculty. Professional development programs that survived and thrived through the cuts of the 1980s and through the 1990s have established legitimacy and identity through their comprehensive and responsive approaches to developing human resources.

Today, compounding the above issues are anticipated faculty and leadership shortages as retirement nears for many well-trained personnel. As community colleges face new political, social, and economic demands on their institutions, new "formats for delivery" of professional development programs have been adopted.

New Formats for Delivery

Successful professional development programs have become "permanent fixtures" typically when someone has championed the cause, facilitating the way for support among a senior-level administrator who allocates the funds, and assigns staff responsibility for program administration (Watts and Hammons, 2002). Successful programs are well organized, may be centralized and run by a single office on campus, occur on a regular basis, and have made professional development part of the job description of employees. Most importantly, they prove their importance to the success of the college.

The following examples show some of the different forms professional development can take and how new delivery formats are working for colleges.

New Faculty Orientation

Between 1999 and 2002, about 35 percent of the faculty retired from St. Louis Community College, reflecting a nationwide trend in faculty and leadership retirement that will continue for the next several years. The New Faculty Orientation (NFO) program at St. Louis Community College, as described by Welch (2002), was created in 1999 to find ways of strengthening the college through its new faculty. The program consisted of a highly programmed, weeklong orientation before the start of the school year; a weekly campus activity during the fall to acquaint faculty with resources; and an instructional skills weekend workshop in the spring or summer. New faculty are paid to participate in these programs run primarily by veteran staff and faculty facilitators.

While the NFO program invites new faculty to participate in a yearlong professional development experience with goals ranging from modeling a learning-centered environment to encouraging collegiality, the program is also creating outcomes that benefit the entire college. These include: (1) attracting new faculty with outstanding credentials; (2) training faculty in using tools to supplement their enthusiasm for teaching (topics include distance education, classroom assessment, and cooperative learning); (3) allowing faculty to gain the knowledge and confidence to try new things; (4) orienting faculty to a multidisciplinary and multidimensional college; (5) building inter-departmental alliances; and (6) setting the foundation that professional development and learning methodologies are a lifelong process.

Web-Based Faculty Development

Valencia Community College (Florida) set up an online faculty development program consisting of face-to-face orientation meeting followed by online sessions, which provide a syllabus, a set of assignments, ongoing discussion threads, and assessments (Nellis et al., 2002). Administered using Time-Revealed Scenarios (TRS) software by WisdomTools, Inc., the online training sessions facilitate "Teaching in College," a course in active-learning classroom techniques, student learning assessments, and other commonly encountered teaching and learning problems in community colleges. Faculty experience collaborative and problem-based learning through discussion of ongoing scenarios. Above all, the web-based faculty development delivery system requires that teachers themselves be active learners, redesign syllabi, share tips, and apply newly-learned tools to their classrooms and report back to their colleagues during the duration of the course. The asynchronous online format allows multiple goals to be met. The online course: (1) reaches faculty who have little time to participate in person, capturing the participation of part-time and adjunct faculty; (2) provides a rich array of online resources and activities for faculty; (3) utilizes a self-discovery learning format; (4) increases interaction between instructors and the faculty development department; and (5) results in a less intimidating format for part-time and less experienced faculty with the benefit of linking them to existing resources and encouraging a sense of inclusiveness.

Comprehensive Programs

The Teaching and Learning Center at College of DuPage (Illinois) has been noted by Troller (2002) as a place where faculty and staff come together to learn. A centralized office presents courses and workshops and invites all personnel to participate. Faculty, administrators, and staff attend the same course offerings, sitting side-by-side during sessions on diversity, advising, time management, supervision, teaching and learning, technology, and wellness. Creating a comprehensive professional development program (one that does not compartmentalize by employee classification) allows for multiple benefits to the entire institution because it offers: (1) less duplication in courses, saving time and money, and allowing opportunity for a wider variety of courses; (2) a unique forum for employee groups who do not interact on a daily basis to share their views and ideas with each other, build rapport, and collaborate cross-sectionally; (3) centralized tracking, evaluation, and administration that monitors the quality of activities and the potential for follow-up programs; and (4) social interaction that results in better navigation through institutional processes and a greater spirit of cooperation.

Great Teachers to Great College Seminar

Retreats offer another approach to the comprehensive learning environment. For over 30 years, the Great Teachers Seminar (GTS) concept (essentially, a loosely structured faculty retreat) has provided the opportunity for faculty to come together to "share successes, identify and solve each other's pedagogical challenges, connect with other faculty, and recommit themselves to teaching excellence." Bergeron and McHargue (2002) have appropriately called this format of professional development "well-facilitated shoptalk" (p. 75). However, during the 1980s, the GTS began to include other college constituencies, and during the 1990s this model evolved into the Great College Seminar where the entire staff was invited to participate. Administrators, faculty, support staff, and students meet to "discuss collegewide issues, to celebrate, to elaborate on what is working well, and to identify issues that need attention" (pp. 80-81). These models have served institutions in becoming learning organizations whose involved participants strengthen the college.

Professional Development: A Tool for Change

Professional development is an effective vehicle for organizational change. Programs that have matured over the past 30 years into comprehensive and responsive entities are shifting attention away from job categories toward seeing employees as change agents within an organizational structure. New formats are reaching many new college constituencies and are including in their goals the broader aims of the institution. Professional development has become an entity that really makes a difference.

Colleges and universities have as their mission teaching, research, and public service, but must also address the task of self-renewal. Active participation in professional development activities, especially when participants are empowered to relate their role to making a difference in the college, provides the opportunity for informal leadership development and ultimately organizational change. Given the role of higher education to respond to community and societal changes, the need for professional development programs has been firmly established.

For more information on professional organizations, including national conferences and other resources, see the *National Council for Staff, Program, and Organizational Development* (http://www.ncspod.org/) and the *National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development* (http://www.nisod.org/).

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